

Pine Creek Dichotomous Key

This key is mean to identify only the plant species found on the Fire Ecology trail between the cement stairs and the boulders.

Depending on the season, many species may be in a dormant stage, making identification difficult. We have tried to use indicators that can be found on the plant throughout the year, but choosing a different plant to identify may be necessary.

A list of all the species in this area of the trail, along with additional information about that species, can be found on the last page.

Start key here→

1. It is a tree a. go to 4
It is not a tree b. go to 2
2. It is a grass a go to 3
It is a not a grass b. go to 6
3. Small seed heads are on individual wavy stems rather than bunched together a. It is Indian Ricegrass
Seed head is bunched together at top b. It is Red Brome
4. It has leaves like scales or needles a. go to 5
It has toothed leaves b. It is a Scrub Oak
5. Leaves are needle-like with a bundle at the base of each needle a. It is a Pinyon Pine
Leaves are scale-like or absent and seeds are in a blue, berry-like cone b. It is a Utah Juniper
6. It has sharp tips to leaves or spines a. go to 7
It does not have sharp tips or spines b. Go to 9
7. It has long, strong leaves 18-24 inches a. It is Banana Yucca
It has spines b. go to 8
8. It is a cactus with a cylinder shaped body a. It is Hedgehog Cactus
It has a flat body like a pancake or beavertail b. It is Old Man Cactus
9. It has alternate branching leaves a. go to 10
It has opposite branching leaves b. go to 15
10. It has woody branches a. go to 12
It has no woody branches b. go to 11
11. It has fuzzy leaves ½ inch wide a. It is Small-Leaved Amsonia
It h as very thin leaves b. It is Goldenbush
12. It has powder green colored leaves ending in three tips and has a strong odor when rubbed between your fingers a. It is Sagebrush
It does not have powder green leaves b. go to 13

13. It has waxy leaves 2-3 inches in length a. It is Yerba Santa
It has short leaves less than two inches in length b. go to 14.
14. Branches end in points a. It is Anderson Lycium
It has light branches that don't end in thorns with bright leaves b. It is the Desert Almond
15. It has trailing red stems with green leaves a. It is White Sand Verbena
It has fuzzy blue/green leaves and a long flowering stalk b. It is Globemallow

Indian Ricegrass (*Stipa hymenoides*) was an important food source for Native Americans and early settlers.

Red Brome (*Bromus rubens*) is a significant source of fuel causing fire hazards in the desert.

Scrub Live Oak (*Quercus turbinella*) is important for its acorns which provide food and tannic acid, which is used on tanning hides. Look for oak apples and other galls since a variety of insects like to use this tree as a nursery.

Pinyon Pine (*Pinus monophylla*). The scientific name of this tree is literally single leaf pine. It is the only pine tree with a single needle in each bundle. This tree only produces cones every third year and provides Pinyon Pine Nuts, which are still used today for food.

Utah Juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*) has berry-like cones that are used for medicinal purposes. The shaggy bark was used as an absorbent, bedding or rope material.

Banana Yucca (*Yucca baccata*) is also called Spanish Bayonet for the long pointy stems that direct water to the base. Native Americans used the fruit as a food source, the threads and roots were used for sewing, roots are also a sudsing agent, but beware of histamines in the leaves' tips.

Hedgehog Cactus (*Echinocereus engelmannii*) also called Strawberry Hedgehog Cactus for the juicy, dark-red, ripened fruit that is high in sugar content and important in the diet of birds and rodents. Others refer to this cactus as the Calico Cactus for its multi-colored spines. The scientific name of this cactus means spiny wax in reference to the wax colored stem from which the spines, which are really modified leaves, sprout.

Old Man Cactus (*Opuntia erinaceae*) named for the long white whickers, like those of an old man's beard, which distinguish it from the regular Pricklypear cactus.

Goldenbush (*Ericamerica linearifolia*)

Sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) is named for the three tipped leaves (tridentata). Sagebrush is Nevada's state flower and was important to Native Americans in the area. It is wrapped into bundles and burned as incense, rope and nets were made from the bark. This variety of sagebrush is not a true member of the mint family and is not used in cooking.

Yerba Santa (*Eriodictyon Augustifolium*) is named for the underside of the leaves which look like a wooly network (eriodictyon) and was used to make medicinal teas for coughs, sore throats, and bladder infections.

Anderson Lycium (*Lycium andersonii*)

Desert Almond (*Prunus fasciculata*) fruit has a toxin similar to cyanide, but after boiling them, the Native Americans were able to eat them. Easily identified in the spring by the silk houses of tent caterpillars.

White Sand Verbena (*Arbonia turbinata*) a valuable dune stabilizer.

Globemallow (*Sphaeralcea ambigua*) was used as a poultice to reduce pain and inflammation. Indian's believed the small hairs on the plants would be an irritant if in the eyes, thus the nickname of sore-eyed poppy. Others thought that the seed of the plant placed in the eye would remove irritants by morning.

Small-Leaved Amsonia (*Amsonia brevifolia*) has a milky sap that is thought to be poisonous. If the desert is fortunate enough to have a good rainfall in the summer, look for these flowers to bloom again in the fall.

